Bootsole

Range Report

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for:

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Introduction

This report describes existing and desired conditions of the range resources within the Bootsole project area and the direct and indirect effects on these resources from implementing the Bootsole Project. It also documents that there would be no significant negative effects on range resources, and therefore, no extraordinary circumstances related to these resources, resulting from implementation of the Bootsole Project.

Affected Environment

Existing Condition

Livestock use in the Bootsole Project area predates the establishment of the Plumas National Forest in 1907. In the twentieth century historic use of the area by sheep was replaced with cattle (USDA 1988). The Bootsole Project area overlaps portions of two livestock grazing allotments. Livestock grazing is authorized under grazing permits issued to two different individuals.

Nearly all of the project area falls within the Antelope Allotment; the allotment is a three-pasture rotation grazing system of which part of South pasture and part of Lowe Pasture are in the Bootsole project area. The grazing permit allows for 612 Head Month 'On' and 61 Head Month 'Off' permitted usually as a herd size of about 200 cow calf pairs with a season of use between May 1 and November 30.

The southeasternmost tip of the project area overlaps with a portion of Clarks Creek Allotment; this allotment is a four-pasture rotation allotment with part of Three Creeks North Pasture in the Bootsole area. The Clark's Creek permit allows for 207 cow calf pairs with a season of use between June 1 and October.

Cows use the entire project area, in fact some locations, e.g., willow and lodgepole pine thickets, would be impassable without cattle trails. Figure 1 provides examples of grazed meadows within the Bootsole project area




Figure 1: Grazed meadows within the Bootsole Project area.

Desired Condition

The Bootsole Project does not propose any actions related to range resources and does not propose management to meet desired conditions for range resources. Management of range resources is directed in part by the following Standards and Guidelines of the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment (SNFPA) Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) Record of Decision (ROD) (USDA 2004).

- To protect hardwood regeneration in grazing allotments, allow livestock browse on no more than 20 percent of annual growth of hardwood seedlings and advanced regeneration. Modify grazing plans if hardwood regeneration and recruitment needs are not being met.
- Prevent disturbance to streambanks and natural lake and pond shorelines caused by resource activities (for example, livestock, off-highway vehicles, and dispersed recreation) from exceeding 20 percent of stream reach or 20 percent of natural lake and pond shorelines. Disturbance includes bank sloughing, chiseling, trampling, and other means of exposing bare soil or cutting plant roots. This standard does not apply to developed recreation sites, sites authorized under Special Use Permits and designated off-highway vehicle routes.
- Under season-long grazing:

  • For meadows in early seral status: limit livestock utilization of grass and grass-like plants to 30 percent (or minimum 6-inch stubble height).

  • For meadows in late seral status: limit livestock utilization of grass and grass-like plants to a maximum of 40 percent (or minimum 4-inch stubble height).
- Limit browsing to no more than 20 percent of the annual leader growth of mature riparian shrubs and no more than 20 percent of individual seedlings. Remove livestock from any area of an allotment when browsing indicates a change in livestock preference from grazing herbaceous vegetation to browsing woody riparian vegetation.

Additional guidance is provided in the 1988 Plumas National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) to:

- Allocate forage to wildlife sufficient to satisfy Goal 5a (maintain habitat for desirable species).
- Graze timber plantations in active allotments unless regeneration is jeopardized; then adjust livestock management.

Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1 – Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Effects

The Bootsole project would result in no changes to the permitted number of animals nor the season or system of grazing. The protection of existing range improvements would be included as mitigation measures in the timber sale contract.

Forest thinning would occur in meadows where conifers have encroached and in forest stands. Conifer removal in meadows and surrounding buffer areas would increase the acres of meadow and allow herbaceous meadow vegetation to respond to improved growing conditions. Improved growth of grasses and forbs and expanded meadow acreage would result in increased forage availability. Thinning overly dense conifer stands would open up these areas and increase the amount of light reaching the forest floor; this would be beneficial for the growth of herbaceous vegetation. Underburning would remove excess woody debris and stimulate growth of grasses and forbs. Increased forage productivity in forest types would supplement the forage available in meadows and would improve livestock distribution across the allotments. Increased forage availability would contribute toward range conditions trending toward desired conditions.

Thinning and prescribed burning would have no direct effect to livestock management. Indirectly, activities such as hauling through areas of livestock concentration, extra vehicle traffic can disturb livestock and change distribution in an area. If livestock are on roadways, log truck traffic may tend to push animals away from planned grazing areas, bunch them against cattleguards, or cause cows with calves to become separated. Coordination between timber sale administrators and range personnel would minimize potential problems and grazing schedules could be adjusted to minimize vehicle/livestock conflicts. This would also be a short-term and localized effect during actual harvest activities. Thinning, underburning, and fuels reduction activities would indirectly benefit livestock management by removing excessively thick trees and downed woody debris that can be difficult to travel through when gathering or moving livestock through the allotments.

Proposed aspen treatments would have no effect to rangelands. Overall, the aspen treatments would benefit the vegetative diversity of rangelands. If monitoring determines browsing is impeding aspen regeneration, new fences could affect livestock movement between areas unless designed with consideration of existing fence locations. Coordination between Forest specialists when determining fence needs would minimize any potential problems for livestock movement.

Managing the road infrastructure on the forest would have no direct or indirect effects to rangelands or livestock management. The existing road system sufficiently supports the needs of the grazing permittees. Maintenance activities usually do not impact their operations during the grazing season. Reconstruction of NFTS roads and obliteration of non-system roads would have no effect to livestock management.

Alternative 2 – No Action

Direct and Indirect Effects

There would be no direct or indirect effects to rangelands from not implementing the Bootsole Project. Over time, the quantity and quality of meadow habitat would continue to decline; this could lead to increased grazing pressure on limited resources, and could cause range conditions to trend away from desired conditions. Similarly, growth of herbaceous forage in the forest understory would be limited by poor growing conditions caused by high stem density and canopy cover.

References

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). 1988. Plumas National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. Available at: Plumas National Forest - Planning (usda.gov)

USDA. 2004. Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment, Record of Decision. USDA Forest Service, Region 5, Vallejo, CA. 72p.